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ABSTRACT

A primary goal of a teacher of regional geography should be to present the course as a study of the changing functions of world regions because the events of each day cause regions, whether political, economic, cultural, or physical, to be in constant flux. The nation-state has become in many ways out-moded as a source of analyzing the events of today and organizations such as the European Common Market function as new regional blocs taking over some functions of individual countries. The deep involvement of the United States with multinational corporations and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as well as an examination of the historical roots of the current imbalance of the trade dilemma now faced by the United States, shows that these new regional bloc forces affect the United States as well as European countries. Moreover, as the nation-state's ability for unilateral action wanes, loyalties of such organizations as oil companies focus on larger supranational organizations. Geography needs to be recognized as an analytical, problem-solving discipline that has much to offer even in the formulation of foreign and domestic governmental policy. To teach these concepts, a geography teacher must develop skills in the cognition of events which leads to changing structure and functions of world regions and must have textbooks based on these realities. (NE)

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THE TEACHING OF SUPRANATIONAL CONCEPTS IN GEOGRAPHY

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These comments come as an outgrowth of more than twenty years of teaching regional geography. Whatever merit they may possess is due in large part to my students whose penetrating questions and unrelenting pressure to make geography a useful tool in their understanding of current world problems forced me to make constant revisions in my teaching strategies. I dedicate these remarks to them.

Over the years my regional geography courses seemed almost to redefine themselves to the study of the changing functions of world regions as I sought to explain, through geographical analysis, the significance of such organizations as the European Coal and Steel Community, the European Free Trade Association, or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. The need to have the student perceive the present arrangement of countries as not being permanent but rather a continuum of transitory phases in a dynamically changing landscape came to be of primary importance. The nation-state as we know it has not always been the basic order of political and economic activity and it became clear over the years that in today's world they may well be in many ways outmoded vehicles for analyzing the events of today. Such organizations as the European Common Market, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade, or the Lome Convention are now functioning as new regional blocs which may supersede, at least in part, some of the functions of individual countries. By employing this view of the world as an area of continuing regional change, perhaps the challenges of change in modern society will

SP 013 826

seem less overwhelming when viewed as an understandable continuance of past change. As an example of the nation-state changes in Europe, Louis Joos has pointed out that:[1]

> Since 1815 27 births and 23 deaths [of countries] produced at least 67 changes in Europe's map, about one every 27 months. We call the nation-state stable, but its average period of political stability has barely attained the life of a car battery. Readers may think that these calculations misleadingly spread out the changes to obtain an abstract average, when they occurred in waves followed by long, stable intervals. In fact, however, the longest period between two births or deaths of a state does not exceed 27 years....

Americans complacently may feel that their country is not subject to the same forces which affect European countries, but our recent celebration of only our 200th birthday and our deep involvement with multi-national corporations should serve to remind us of the rapidity with which political and economic regions change, given the past history of the human race. Regional Geography can be an exciting study of pulsating, flexing, and contracting regions, changing with the events of each day. Regions, whether political, economic, cultural, or even physical, do not stay still, and the teacher of geography had best not stand still either.

In a recent article, Professor John W. Morris of the University of Oklahoma, called for greater recognition of this concept by us geographers when he stated:[2]

> Everywhere, every day the world changes--in ages past not as rapidly as today, but just as assuredly and as definitely,....Today the world is in a great revolution, for not only are patterns of the past being broken up, but there also is an endless struggle to find new patterns for the future.
>
> Revolutions are not new. They have occurred in one place or another, in some way or another since the beginning of time. This nation of ours is a product of revolution, a breaking with the past, a starting of something new.

Of great significance is Professor Morris' call for a recognition that countries are usually not independent but rather members of regions of interdependent countries.

As we enter the 1980's loyalties of such organizations as oil companies, automobile manufacturers, and financial institutions increasingly focus on larger supranational (multi-national) organizations, as the ability of a solitary nation-state to control its own destiny through unilateral action seems to be substantially on the wane. Individuals, sensing the weakening of nation-state governments, seek to buy gold, diamonds, real estate, or collectibles as they lose confidence in paper money issued by single national governments (despite attempts to counteract this by such schemes as the European Monetary System). Businessmen choose to locate their centers of production in several countries but, as much as possible, within the protection of international regional organizations, such as the European Common Market, as a hedge against failure of the limited market of a single country.

The significance of changing marketing regions can be seen by an examination of the historical roots of the current imbalance of the trade dilemma faced by the United States. During the course of World War II the United States evolved as the world's largest producer of goods, having become the center of manufacture of war material in large part due to her isolated location from the actual fields of fighting. By 1945, she was producing for both her internal market and the large European market. After the war, through the Marshall Plan and the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, a system was devised to continue this flow of American-made goods to Western Europe for the purpose of rebuilding the shattered European economy. In gearing the American productive system to the size of both the internal market of the United States and that of Europe as well, the stage was set for the day when Europe would again produce her own goods and inevitably become a competitor with the

United States for these same markets. Indeed Europe would seek to compete in the U.S. market itself. The United States had a need to plan ahead to meet the challenge of European productivity in order to maintain a standard of living for its people which had become greater by far than that in any other part of the world.

Many Americans attributed the rise of their country's economic power almost solely to superior planning, better business techniques, and national character traits; and the American educational system was not reluctant to dwell on those points in describing the factors which "made America great." This is not to minimize or demean the tremendous accomplishments of American society, rather it is to place the rise of American economic power in a regional perspective so as to see more clearly some fundamental root causes of its growth and the problems that resulted in the 1970's when that growth diminished and other regions attained a comparable standard of living. Perhaps the fall from world economic leadership is not the fault of any deterioration of the American character. Americans may be working just as hard and efficiently as in the past, but they are being thwarted by forces which our leaders and educators have not generally recognized. Failure to plan ahead to the day when Europe again would become a competitive economic region of great productivity has blinded many American decision-makers to some of the root causes of current economic problems, and thus policy has not been formulated to deal with the roots of the problems.

Each year short-term solutions to American trade imbalances result in the exacerbation of problems of unemployment, inflation, and loss of public confidence in our way of life. More efficient production or governmentally subsidized production of the same type and quality of goods which used to sell easily in the European region may not solve

balance of trade problems. Europeans are more selective in their purchasing patterns compared to the desperate days during and just after World War II. They now have a choice between American-made goods, those produced on their own continent, or in areas such as Japan. Often transportation costs alone dictate that they buy their own products and when American businessmen moved a significant portion of their manufacturing plants to Europe during the 1960's they faced rising nationalistic sentiments which often resulted in "buying European." In many cases products which sold well in the United States, some instant foods for example, did not meet the cultural tastes of Europeans.

Recognition of Europe as a region of changing economic function may result in new, innovative thinking geared to long-range solutions such as re-evaluation of types of products to be manufactured for sale consistent with type of markets available. The private business sector has long acknowledged the value of such institutions as the American Chamber of Commerce in gearing American sales to existing overseas markets through such vehicles as Trade Fairs. Indeed, it was the Americans who pioneered the concept of government paving the way to sales in foreign markets. In the long run such changes may be less expensive than providing governmental support for businesses which continue to produce goods for markets which no longer exist, or which are severely limited.

In recent days Americans have engaged in lively debate as to the merits of economic courses of action, especially so-called "supply-side" economic plans. These plans must be viewed in light of the changing function of world regions. If decision-makers at the corporate level see the world in some configuration other than nation-

state regions, perhaps solutions based on independent national plans stand little chance of success. For instance, if the United States effects tax cuts in order to spur domestic investment and finds these monies invested in more profitable foreign regions, the results of such a program might be self-defeating by the creation of jobs overseas and a consequent loss of jobs in the United States. Countries attempting to develop independent economic plans in a world of new regions consisting of interdependent countries may find that their plans simply will not work. Worse yet, the citizenry may lose faith in that political system no matter which political party is in power.

Just as during World War II, when a need for geographic knowledge resulted in a renewed interest in the discipline of geography, there is now a need to recognize that geography is an analytical, problem-solving discipline which has much to offer in the formulation of governmental policy both foreign and domestic.

Speaking at a meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris, France, General James Gavin argued for the replacement of archaic military strategies in foreign affairs by those based on economics. The most successful strategy, he pointed out, is a strategy based on the planner's greatest stength and for the United States, even in the opinion of her adversaries, that unquestionably means economic strength. This opinion, expressed as early as 1971, seems to take on greater significance today as national economic recovery plans appear to run afoul of the realities of international commerce. In today's world, where multi-national corporations produce a gross product far in excess of many nations, such strategies place a new burden on the shoulders of the American businessman, for if politicians are unable or unwilling to lead, then a business community may emerge de facto as a supranational system of rules and regulations which

may partially replace the function of independent political states. The contention here is that such a world already exists in the form or organizations such as the Lome Convention, G.A.T.T., O.E.C.D., O.P.E.C., and the E.E.C., to name only a few.

It may well be that many teachers of geography paint a picture of the world to their students which is an archaic as the military strategies General Gavin would like to replace. Students memorize the location of countries as the fundamental units of decision-making while multi-national corporations operate within supranational world regions which remain unidentified or else are viewed as vague, irrelevant institutions having little impact on the course of world affairs. A primary goal of the teacher of geography ought to be to develop a strong sense of the changing structure and functions of world regions.

In order to instill the student's sense of the changing functions of world regions, the teacher must develop skills in the cognition of events which lead to such change. Traditionally, journalists have sought out and publicized the dramatic political and social conflict which inevitably results in the formation of such organizations as the European Common Market, thus the role played by Charles de Gaulle in delaying the admission of the United Kingdom was widely known and even perceived by some professional geographers as a sign that the Common Market was failing, while at the same time such events as the standardization of pipe fittings, the common establishment of trade fairs, and the standardization of legal codes for mergers went virtually unnoticed. Perhaps our interest in cultural geography has outweighed our interest in economy geography and led us to headline in our classes as well as our newspapers the acts of violence by Europe's unemployed and the frustrated political action groups. The revival

of Europe as a power center is happening in such fragmentary acts that its growth is gradual and even quiet, yet this revival may be one of the most significant events taking place on the world stage at present.

The roots of these subtle gradual, yet profound changes may be found as early as the Industrial Revolution. Prior to 1800 the family, in most cases, was perceived as the basic unit of economic activity and the village or farm was the place where the family firm functioned as an economic institution. Governments existed, but their impact, for most people, was indirect and remote. As Europe industrialized, a radical relocation of workers took place. Industrialization required the concentration of people and material in new locations, and to effect such concentrations new social institutions evolved. State governments assumed new functions in economic activity, education, and eventually in cultural and recreational areas as well. By the end of the nineteenth century, cities had replaced the village as the center of manufacturing. The human geography of Europe experienced major rearrangements and social institutions changed as well. Businessmen looked to governments which had power over a wider area than local village councils for protection and regulation. A shift of loyalty from the village to the state resulted and grew increasingly strong with the passing of time. State governments organized within the areal framework of countries came to be accepted as the basic order of human activity and that perception remains the core of regional geography as it is conventionally taught today.

However, we live in a new era. And, as Robin Butland has said:[3]

> The eras when one nation retained strength and power through supremacy over farflung colonies are over. Integration with neighbor nations is the necessary ingredient for survival...when a...state joins the Common

Market it irrevocably pools certain sovereign rights by transforming them to a new entity...the European Economic Community.

Lest we forget that such changes are not confined to Europe, we should consider supranational organizations of which the United States is a member. One is the O.E.C.D. whose members produce two-thirds of the world's gross national product and have, acting in concert, set rules and regulations of corporate behavior, established rules of disclosure on profit, wages, sales, and transfer prices. Conventional wisdom points out that the O.E.C.D. has no political power, thus it is weak. However, recent history has demonstrated the economic considerations have all too often dominated political and cultural concerns--as witness the entry of the United Kingdom into the Common Market despite nearly overwhelming cultural and political sentiment against such entry. There can be no doubt that the United States must develop economic recovery plans within the framework of a large number of international economic regions. Yet the textbook which I use, and which I consider to be the best of those available, dismisses the O.E.C.D. as having little power and having only a vague role in world affairs. (I might add that this same book cites the number of members and falls four members short.)

We must develop textbooks based on the realities of these new regions and train a generation of teachers of geography who are alert to the changing make-up and function of these regions. Only then will geographers be in a position to take their rightful place along side historians, political scientists and economists as advisors to our government in Washington, D. C.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Louis Joose, an editorial in European Community, April 1973, p. 4.

[2]John W. Morris, "An Age of Reality," Journal of Geography, p. 4.

[3]Robin Butland, "European Adventure," Geographical Magazine, January, 1979, p. 268.